

ACCSC ACCREDITATION ALERT

To: ACCSC-Accredited Institutions and Other Interested Parties
From: Michale S. McComis, Ed.D., Executive Director
Date: January 1, 2011
Subject: Revisions to the ACCSC *Standards of Accreditation* and New Policy Announcement

The Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (“ACCSC”) has made revisions to the *Standards of Accreditation* in the following areas:

Rules of Process and Procedure:

- *Section X (D)(3), Rules of Process and Procedure, Standards of Accreditation – Disclosure of Commission Actions to the Public*

Substantive Standards:

- *Section II (B)(3), Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation – Baccalaureate Degrees*
- *Catalog Checklist, Substantive Standards, Forms and Reports, Standards of Accreditation*

ACCSC has established a new policy in the following area:

- *Unannounced On-Site Evaluations*

For additional information related to this *Accreditation Alert*, please contact Michale S. McComis, Ed.D., Executive Director, at 703.247.4520 or via e-mail at mccomis@accsc.org.

Revisions to the Rules of Process and Procedure, Standards of Accreditation
Effective January 1, 2011

Section X (D)(3), Rules of Process and Procedure, Standards of Accreditation – Disclosure of Commission Actions to the Public

The Commission has revised this section of the *Rules of Process and Procedure* to comply with provisions within the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 and the ensuing regulations effective July 1, 2010. Specifically, new language in the federal regulations states that accreditors are to provide notice of “[a] final decision to take any ***other*** adverse action, as defined by the agency” – the word “other” refers to non denial and revocation adverse actions. ACCSC’s Rules define the denial of a substantive change as an adverse action, but previously also stated that ACCSC did not provide public notice of the denial of a substantive change. Accordingly, the Commission has revised this rule to align with federal requirements. The revision in effect as of January 1, 2011 follows:

3. The Commission, at the same time it notifies the school, will make public an action subject to appeal, ~~with the exception of the denial of a substantive change application.~~ A summary of the reasons for the Commission’s action will also be made public along with information pertaining to the ACCSC appeal process.

Revisions to the Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation
Effective January 1, 2011

Section II (B)(3), Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation – Baccalaureate Degrees

As proposed in the June 16, 2010 *Call for Comment*, the Commission has revised the baccalaureate degree program standard. This revision allows for a core curriculum with one or more concentrations to be included within the technical/occupational curriculum of a baccalaureate degree. A concentration must consist of related courses that support an in-depth study or focus in an area related to the overall degree. The newly adopted standard allows schools to develop baccalaureate degree programs with a concentration through the Application for Approval of a Baccalaureate Degree or to add a concentration within existing baccalaureate degree programs through an Application for Substantive Program Modification-Addition of a Concentration.

The new *Section II (B)(3)(d), Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation* is as follows:

SECTION II – PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

B. Degree Program

3. Baccalaureate Degrees
 - d. A baccalaureate degree program shall include a minimum of 60 semester credit hours or 90 quarter credit hours that represent courses in the occupational field for which the degree is awarded. Within those occupationally related courses, a school may offer one or more concentrations, which provide a focused area of training and establish specialized learning experiences beyond the generalist level. Concentrations must consist of 18-24 semester credit hours (27-36 quarter credit hours) of occupationally specialized course work of which, at a minimum, nine semester credit hours (13.5 quarter credit hours) represent upper level coursework.

Catalog Checklist, Appendix II - Applications, Reports, and Forms, Standards of Accreditation

Effective April 17, 2008 ACCSC promulgated standards pertaining to transfer-of-credit policies, decisions, and disclosure. As a part of those requirements, *Section II (A)(10)(b)(ii), Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation* requires a school to: “publish its transfer-of-credit policy in its catalog and clearly communicate the criteria and process for evaluating and accepting credit earned at other institutions for transfer.” Accordingly, the Commission has made a conforming change to the ACCSC Catalog Checklist to include the disclosure of a school’s transfer-of-credit policy (item #11). In addition, on October 1, 2009 ACCSC promulgated a requirement that a school’s probation policy must be published in its catalog and as such this requirement has also been added to the Catalog Checklist (item #19) (*Section VII (A)(3)(e), Substantive Standards, Standards of Accreditation*). Other minor modifications have been made to the Catalog Checklist such as reordering or restating the items required. Please be sure to use the ACCSC Catalog Checklist dated January 1, 2011 for all future catalog submissions, which is available for download from the Commission’s website at:

<http://www.accsc.org/Content/FormsAndReports/FormsAndReports.asp>.

New Policy Announcement – Unannounced On-Site Evaluations **Effective July 1, 2011**

From 1994 through 1998 ACCSC had a policy to conduct a regular unannounced on-site evaluation to each accredited institution at least once within the institution’s term of accreditation. When amendments to the Higher Education Act removed this as a federal requirement for recognized accrediting agencies, ACCSC modified its requirement to conduct unannounced on-site evaluations only when the Commission deemed such a review necessary. The Commission, however, has determined that there is merit to returning, in a limited fashion, to a systematic unannounced on-site evaluation policy.

Section III (A)(3) & VII (Q)(2), Rules of Process and Procedure, Standards of Accreditation give the Commission the authority to conduct unannounced on-site evaluations as a means to monitor compliance with accrediting standards. While the Commission previously opted to direct unannounced on-site evaluations only on case-by-case basis, the Commission has determined that unannounced on-site evaluations conducted on a more regular basis will strengthen ACCSC’s overall evaluation and monitoring process. The Commission believes based on its experience that unannounced on-site evaluations serve to: a) help institutions to “course correct” at points between renewal cycles, b) identify issues that institutions can use to focus on for institutional improvement measures, and c) identify areas of non-compliance, whether they be serious or incidental, more timely and more readily. In each of these three areas, there is a significant likelihood of positive results leading to corrective action, enhanced compliance, and institutional improvement.

Accordingly, the Commission has opted to implement a policy effective July 1, 2011 whereby ACCSC will conduct regular unannounced on-site evaluations to a limited number of its accredited institutions on an annual basis. ACCSC will attempt to conduct unannounced on-site evaluations to approximately 5% of the ACCSC membership, which would yield approximately 38-40 evaluations per year. In keeping with ACCSC’s established policies, the cost of an unannounced on-site evaluation will be borne by the institution and set at \$2,400 (\$400 per subsequent day if necessary) to cover the cost of staff resources and travel expenditures.

The regular unannounced on-site evaluation is a general evaluation with respect to monitoring compliance with ACCSC’s *Standards of Accreditation*. Generally, a regular unannounced on-site evaluation will

cover the following areas: a tour of the facilities; student surveys; student file review; interviews with key personnel; verification of Annual Report data; and a review of the school's catalog, enrollment agreement, and current advertising. The review, however, can be expanded as areas of non-compliance are identified. In addition, if the Commission has received any complaint regarding a school, the area(s) covered by the complaint(s) could be included in the review as well.

The Commission will not select a school for more than one regular unannounced on-site evaluation within that school's normal term of accreditation. The Commission, however, reserves the right to direct an additional on-site evaluation, announced or unannounced, to institutions selected for the regular unannounced on-site evaluation as deemed necessary. In addition, the Commission will continue to have the authority to direct on-site evaluations, announced or unannounced, to any institution when deemed necessary in accordance with the Commission's *Rules of Process and Procedure*.

Please contact Michale S. McComis, Ed.D., Executive Director, with any questions regarding the Commission's new unannounced on-site evaluation policy.